

Comparative Constitutions

Time Needed: One to two class periods

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets; Overhead transparencies; Online or paper copy of your state's constitution

Copy Instructions:

Reading & Comparison Activity packet (*class set; double-sided*)
 Comparison Worksheet packet (*class set; double-sided*)

Learning Objectives. Students will be able to:

- Explain the general differences between the U.S. Constitution and state constitutions
- Identify how state constitutions might guarantee more or broader rights than the U.S. Constitution using the Florida Constitution as an example
- Analyze the differences between amending the U.S. Constitution and amending state constitutions, using the Constitution of Virginia as an example
- Compare the constitution of their own state with the U.S. Constitution

STEP BY STEP

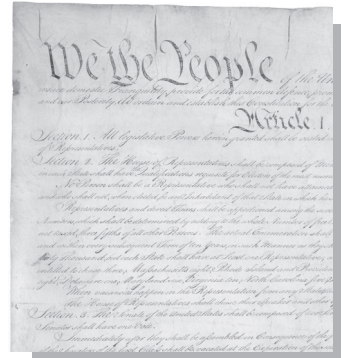
- PREPARE** for the lesson by finding a copy of your state constitution (online or paper) and locating the provisions that answer the questions in the Comparison Worksheet. Fill out a copy of the Comparison Worksheet (5 pages) for yourself.
- ANTICIPATE** by asking the student how many constitutions the United States has. Explain that there is one for the federal government, one for each state, and many counties and local governments have them too!
- DISTRIBUTE** one Reading & Comparison Activity packet to each student.
- READ** the first paragraph with the class.
- DISPLAY** the preamble comparison chart on your overhead projector.
- COMPARE** the two preambles. Help the class underline the parts that are the same by underlining on your overhead master with a pen.
- CONTINUE** through the comparison packet in this way, reading and comparing until you have finished the comparison packet. (When comparing the rights each constitution gives to citizens, make sure to help students find the main general differences instead of trying to compare word for word.) Working through this packet models the kinds of things students will look for in the next activity when they will compare their own state constitution with the U.S. Constitution.
- DISTRIBUTE** one comparison worksheet to each student
- PROJECT** an online version of your state constitution, starting with the preamble. (If you don't have projector capability, you might want to cut and paste relevant parts of your state constitution into a document and photocopy it for the students instead of copying the entire document.)
- COMPARE** your state's preamble with the U.S. preamble. Have students copy the state preamble onto their worksheets.
- CONTINUE** through the packet, comparing relevant parts of your state constitution and having students note similarities and differences on the comparison worksheet
- FINISH** by helping students draw a diagram of your state's constitutional amendment process on the last page of the packet

Comparative Constitutions



Name: _____

If You've Seen One . . .

. . . you have not seen them all! State constitutions usually have many things in common with the United States Constitution, but there are many differences too. The U.S. Constitution begins with a **Preamble** that introduces the Constitution and explains its purpose. The Florida Constitution, for example, also has a preamble.



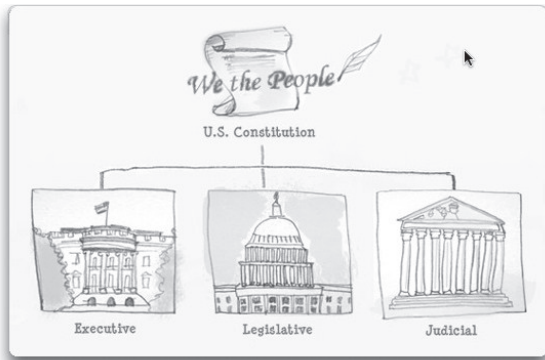
Activity: Compare the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution with the Preamble of the Florida Constitution. **Box** the parts that are *the same* in both documents.



	U.S. CONSTITUTION	FLORIDA CONSTITUTION	
	<p><u>We the People of the</u> United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.</p>	<p><u>We, the people of the</u> State of Florida, being grateful to Almighty God for our constitutional liberty, in order to secure its benefits, perfect our government, insure domestic tranquility, maintain public order, and guarantee equal civil and political rights to all, do ordain and establish this constitution.</p>	

Government Rules!

Just as the U.S. Constitution gives the rules for how the U.S. government should run, state constitutions give rules for how a state government should run. Like the U.S. Constitution, state constitutions describe the branches of government that the state will have. Often these branches are very similar, but if you take a closer look you will find differences.

Activity: Compare how the government is set up in the U.S. Constitution with how the state government is set up by the Florida Constitution. This time, underline the parts that are *different*.



	U.S. CONSTITUTION	FLORIDA CONSTITUTION	
	<p>The executive Power shall be vested in a <u>President of the United States of America</u>.</p> <p>The judicial Power of the United States shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.</p>	<p>The <u>supreme</u> executive power shall be vested in a <u>governor</u>.</p> <p>The judicial power shall be vested in a supreme court, district courts of appeal, circuit courts and county courts.</p>	

Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

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U.S. CONSTITUTION

All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two senators from each State, chosen for six Years

The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second year...

All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives

Every bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it If any Bill shall not be returned within ten Days the Same shall be a Law...

[S]uch District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of particular States . . ., become the Seat of Government of the United States...



FLORIDA CONSTITUTION

The legislative power of the state shall be vested in a legislature of the State of Florida, consisting of a senate and a house of representatives...

Senators shall be elected for terms of four years ...

Members of the house of representatives shall be elected for terms of two years...

Any bill may originate in either house...

Every bill passed by the legislature shall be presented to the governor for approval and shall become a law if the governor approves and signs it, or fails to veto it within seven consecutive days after presentation.

The seat of government shall be the City of Tallahassee, in Leon County...

Everybody's Got Rights





State constitutions also contain many of the same rights and guarantees you see in the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land and cannot be violated. That means state constitutions cannot give state citizens fewer rights than the U.S. Constitution gives. However, state constitutions can guarantee *more* rights than the U.S. Constitution does. For example, a state constitution might give more protection for a right that is also in the U.S. Constitution. A state constitution might also include additional rights that are not found in the U.S. Constitution. Finally, a state constitution might include rules about things that are unique to that state, such as how the state's natural resources should be preserved.



Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

Activity: To see how a state constitution might offer similar yet different rights than the U.S. Constitution, compare the U.S. Constitution with parts of the Florida Constitution. Underline the *main difference* in Florida’s constitution (don’t get too nitpicky), then check the statement that best describes the difference.



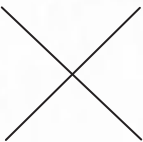

 U.S. CONSTITUTION	FLORIDA CONSTITUTION 	EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE:
No state shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.	All natural persons, <u>female and male alike</u> , are equal before the law.	The right being discussed is equality before the _____. Florida’s constitution gives <input type="checkbox"/> more protection <input type="checkbox"/> the same protection.
The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied... on account of race, ...[or] on account of sex ...[or to citizens] who are eighteen years of age or older...	No person shall be deprived of any right because of race, religion, national origin, or physical disability.	The U.S. Constitution talks about the right to _____, while the Florida constitution talks about _____ right. The Florida constitution gives <input type="checkbox"/> more protection <input type="checkbox"/> the same protection.
	All working Floridians are entitled to be paid a minimum wage...	Does the U.S. Constitution mention a minimum wage? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...	Every person may speak, write and publish sentiments on all subjects but shall be responsible for the abuse of that right. No law shall be passed to restrain or abridge the liberty of speech or of the press.	The right being discussed is freedom of _____ and of the _____. Both constitutions forbid passing _____ that limit these rights. The Florida constitution says people can’t _____ these rights.
A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.	The right of the people to keep and bear arms in defense of themselves and of the lawful authority of the state shall not be infringed, except that the manner of bearing arms may be regulated by law.	The right being discussed is the right to _____. Florida’s constitution allows the state to limit <input type="checkbox"/> the right to bear arms. <input type="checkbox"/> how people bear arms.
	No gill nets or other entangling nets shall be used in any Florida waters.	Does the U.S. Constitution mention fishing nets? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Keep going on the next page!

Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

Continued from last page...

 U.S. CONSTITUTION	FLORIDA CONSTITUTION 	EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE:
<p>No person shall be . . . subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law . . .</p>	<p>No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, or be twice put in jeopardy for the same offense, or be compelled in any criminal matter to be a witness against oneself.</p>	<p>The rights being discussed are due _____, double _____, and being a _____ against yourself.</p> <p>The Florida constitution gives <input type="checkbox"/> more protection <input type="checkbox"/> the same protection.</p>
<p>The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated...</p>	<p>The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures, and against the unreasonable interception of private communications by any means, shall not be violated.</p>	<p>Both constitutions guarantee freedom from unreasonable _____ and _____.</p> <p>The Florida constitution also guarantees freedom from unreasonable _____ of private _____.</p>
	<p>Adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education...</p>	<p>The Florida constitution requires the state to maintain a system of _____.</p> <p>Does the U.S. constitution mention schools or education? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...</p>	<p>There shall be no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting or penalizing the free exercise thereof. Religious freedom shall not justify practices inconsistent with public morals, peace or safety.</p>	<p>The right being discussed is the freedom of _____.</p> <p>Florida's constitution says people cannot practice religion in a way that is <input type="checkbox"/> immoral <input type="checkbox"/> not peaceful <input type="checkbox"/> unsafe <input type="checkbox"/> all of the above</p>
	<p>Those in the Everglades Agricultural Area who cause water pollution shall be primarily responsible for paying the costs of the abatement of that pollution.</p>	<p>Does the U.S. constitution mention cleaning up pollution? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Does the U.S. constitution mention the Florida Everglades? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

Comparative Constitutions



Name: _____



We Need a Little Change Around Here

Nothing stays the same—not even constitutions. Changing a constitution is a big deal. That’s because a constitution is the foundation for all the other laws in the country or in a state. Because constitutions are so important, it’s not easy to change them. They don’t pull a constitutional amendment out of a hat! Usually there is a complicated procedure that requires many people to agree on the proposed amendment. There are two main steps to amending (changing) most constitutions: proposing (suggesting) an amendment and ratifying (approving) the amendment.

Compare the methods for amending the U.S. Constitution with the methods for amending Virginia’s Constitution.

	 U.S. CONSTITUTION	VIRGINIA CONSTITUTION 
STEP 1: Proposing an Amendment	<p><u>Method 1:</u> Two-thirds of the members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives vote to propose an amendment</p> <p><u>Method 2:</u> the legislatures in 2/3 of the states vote to propose an amendment</p>	<p><u>Method 1:</u> Either the state senate or the state house of delegates (like a house of representatives) proposes an amendment, and a majority of members of both houses vote to approve the idea</p> <p><u>Method 2:</u> Two-thirds of the members of both the Senate and the House of Delegates vote to call a convention for proposing an amendment</p>
STEP 2: Ratifying an Amendment	<p><u>Method 1:</u> the legislatures in three-fourths (3/4) of the states vote to approve the amendment</p> <p><u>Method 2:</u> Three-fourths of the states hold conventions that vote to approve the amendment</p>	<p><u>Method 1:</u> After the next election of the House of Delegates, both the Senate and the House of Delegates vote to approve the amendment. Finally, the amendment is put on a ballot for the voters. If the voters approve the amendment, it becomes part of the constitution.</p>

Compare: There is one major way that ratifying Virginia’s constitution is different from ratifying the U.S. constitution. What is that major difference? Why do you think we don’t do that for ratifying the U.S. Constitution?

How Does Your Constitution Compare?

A. Preamble

Draw your state here!

Write your state here!



U.S. CONSTITUTION

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

_____ CONSTITUTION

Write your state's preamble here:

B. Government



U.S. CONSTITUTION

The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.

The judicial Power of the United States shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.

All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

_____ CONSTITUTION

Who has the executive power in your state?

What courts have the judicial power in your state?

How is the legislative power structured in your state?

Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

Continued from last page...



U.S. CONSTITUTION

The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two senators from each State, chosen for six Years...

The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second year...

All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives...

Every bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it... If any Bill shall not be returned... within ten Days... the Same shall be a Law...

[S]uch District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of particular States..., become the Seat of Government of the United States...

_____ CONSTITUTION

How long do your state senators serve?

How long do your state representatives serve?

What does your constitution say about where bills may start?

What role does your state's governor play in making a bill into a law?

Does your state constitution say where your state's seat of government is located?


✓ Quick Check

- 1) How many branches of government does your state have? _____ branches
- 2) Look at your state's judicial system. What is the highest court in your state called? _____
- 3) The U.S. Constitution says that U.S. Senators must be at least 30 years old and Representatives must be at least 25 years old. Does your state constitution give a minimum age for legislators? _____ must be _____
_____ must be _____
- 4) The President of the United States serves a 4-year term. How long is your state governor's term of office? _____ years

Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____




C. Rights

 U.S. CONSTITUTION	_____ CONSTITUTION	EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE:
No state shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.	What does your state constitution say about equality before the law?	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule
The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude [or] on account of sex [or to citizens] who are eighteen years of age or older...	Does your state constitution guarantee any rights to any specific groups of people?	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule
Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...	What does your state constitution say about freedom of speech and the press?	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule
A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.	What does your state constitution say about the right to bear arms? Does your state constitution put any limits on <u>how</u> people may bear arms?	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule

Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

Continued from last page...

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<p>No person shall be . . . subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law . . .</p>	<p>What does your state constitution say about Double jeopardy? Being a witness against yourself? Due process of law?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule
<p>The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated...</p>	<p>What does your state constitution say about searches and seizures?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule
	<p>What does your state constitution say about the right to an education?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule
	<p>Find something in your state constitution that deals with an issue that is unique to your state.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> No difference <input type="checkbox"/> Adds additional rights <input type="checkbox"/> Unique state rule

What Does it Take to Amend Your Constitution?

Look at your state constitution to find out how it can be amended. In the space below, draw a diagram showing the process for amending your state constitution.

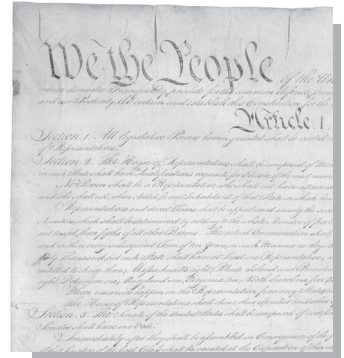


Comparative Constitutions



Name: _____

If You've Seen One . . .

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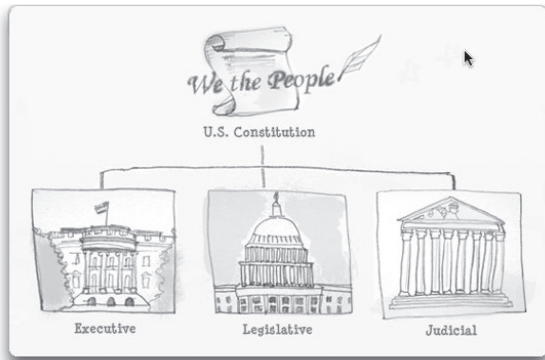
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We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.	We, the people of the State of Florida, being grateful to Almighty God for our constitutional liberty, in order to secure its benefits, perfect our government, insure domestic tranquility, maintain public order, and guarantee equal civil and political rights to all, do ordain and establish this constitution.

Government Rules!

Just as the U.S. Constitution gives the rules for how the U.S. government should run, state constitutions give rules for how a state government should run. Like the U.S. Constitution, state constitutions describe the branches of government that the state will have. Often these branches are very similar, but if you take a closer look you will find differences.

Activity: Compare how the government is set up in the U.S. Constitution with how the state government is set up by the Florida Constitution. This time, underline the parts that are *different*.



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Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

Continued from last page...



U.S. CONSTITUTION

All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two senators from each State, chosen for six Years...

The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second year...

All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives

Every bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it... If any Bill shall not be returned within ten Days... the Same shall be a Law

[S]uch District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of particular States.... become the Seat of Government of the United States...



FLORIDA CONSTITUTION

The legislative power of the state shall be vested in a legislature of the State of Florida, consisting of a senate.. and a house of representatives...

Senators shall be elected for terms of four years ...

Members of the house of representatives shall be elected for terms of two years...

Any bill may originate in either house..

Every bill passed by the legislature shall be presented to the governor for approval and shall become a law if the governor approves and signs it, or fails to veto it within seven consecutive days after presentation.

The seat of government shall be the City of Tallahassee, in Leon County...

Everybody's Got Rights





State constitutions also contain many of the same rights and guarantees you see in the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land and cannot be violated. That means state constitutions cannot give state citizens fewer rights than the U.S. Constitution gives. However, state constitutions can guarantee *more* rights than the U.S. Constitution does. For example, a state constitution might give more protection for a right that is also in the U.S. Constitution. A state constitution might also include additional rights that are not found in the U.S. Constitution. Finally, a state constitution might include rules about things that are unique to that state, such as how the state's natural resources should be preserved.



Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

Activity: To see how a state constitution might offer similar yet different rights than the U.S. Constitution, compare the U.S. Constitution with parts of the Florida Constitution. Underline the *main difference* in Florida’s constitution (don’t get too nitpicky), then check the statement that best describes the difference.



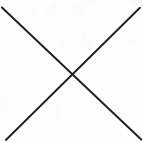

 U.S. CONSTITUTION	FLORIDA CONSTITUTION 	EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE:
No state shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.	All natural persons, <u>female and male alike</u> , are equal before the law.	The right being discussed is equality before the <u>law</u> . Florida’s constitution gives <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> more protection <input type="checkbox"/> the same protection.
<u>The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied... on account of race, ...[or] on account of sex ...[or to citizens] who are eighteen years of age or older...</u>	No person shall be deprived of <u>any right</u> because of race, <u>religion</u> , <u>national origin</u> , or <u>physical disability</u> .	The U.S. Constitution talks about the right to <u>vote</u> , while the Florida constitution talks about <u>any</u> right. The Florida constitution gives <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> more protection <input type="checkbox"/> the same protection.
	All working Floridians are entitled to be paid a minimum wage...	Does the U.S. Constitution mention a minimum wage? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...	<u>Every person may speak, write and publish sentiments on all subjects but shall be responsible for the abuse of that right.</u> No law shall be passed to restrain or abridge the liberty of speech or of the press.	The right being discussed is freedom of <u>speech</u> and of the <u>press</u> . Both constitutions forbid passing <u>laws</u> that limit these rights. The Florida constitution says people can’t <u>abuse</u> these rights.
A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.	The right of the people to keep and bear arms in defense of themselves and of the lawful authority of the state shall not be infringed, except that <u>the manner of bearing arms may be regulated by law</u> .	The right being discussed is the right to <u>bear arms</u> . Florida’s constitution allows the state to limit <input type="checkbox"/> the right to bear arms. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> how people bear arms.
	No gill nets or other entangling nets shall be used in any Florida waters.	Does the U.S. Constitution mention fishing nets? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Keep going on the next page!

Comparative Constitutions

Name: _____

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 U.S. CONSTITUTION	FLORIDA CONSTITUTION 	EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE:
<p>No person shall be . . . subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law . . .</p>	<p>No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, or be twice put in jeopardy for the same offense, or be compelled in any criminal matter to be a witness against oneself.</p>	<p>The rights being discussed are due <u>process</u>, double <u>jeopardy</u>, and being a <u>witness</u> against yourself.</p> <p>The Florida constitution gives <input type="checkbox"/> more protection <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the same protection.</p>
<p>The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated...</p>	<p>The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures, <u>and against the unreasonable interception of private communications by any means, shall not be violated.</u></p>	<p>Both constitutions guarantee freedom from unreasonable <u>searches</u> and <u>seizures</u>.</p> <p>The Florida constitution also guarantees freedom from unreasonable <u>interception</u> of private <u>communications</u>.</p>
	<p>Adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education...</p>	<p>The Florida constitution requires the state to maintain a system of <u>free public schools</u>.</p> <p>Does the U.S. constitution mention schools or education? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...</p>	<p>There shall be no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting or penalizing the free exercise thereof. <u>Religious freedom shall not justify practices inconsistent with public morals, peace or safety.</u></p>	<p>The right being discussed is the freedom of <u>religion</u>.</p> <p>Florida's constitution says people cannot practice religion in a way that is <input type="checkbox"/> immoral <input type="checkbox"/> not peaceful <input type="checkbox"/> unsafe <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> all of the above</p>
	<p>Those in the Everglades Agricultural Area who cause water pollution shall be primarily responsible for paying the costs of the abatement of that pollution.</p>	<p>Does the U.S. constitution mention cleaning up pollution? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Does the U.S. constitution mention the Florida Everglades? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>

Comparative Constitutions



Name: _____



We Need a Little Change Around Here

Nothing stays the same—not even constitutions. Changing a constitution is a big deal. That’s because a constitution is the foundation for all the other laws in the country or in a state. Because constitutions are so important, it’s not easy to change them. They don’t pull a constitutional amendment out of a hat! Usually there is a complicated procedure that requires many people to agree on the proposed amendment. There are two main steps to amending (changing) most constitutions: proposing (suggesting) an amendment and ratifying (approving) the amendment.

Compare the methods for amending the U.S. Constitution with the methods for amending Virginia’s Constitution:

	 U.S. CONSTITUTION	VIRGINIA CONSTITUTION 
STEP 1: Proposing an Amendment	<p><u>Method 1:</u> Two-thirds of the members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives vote to propose an amendment</p> <p><u>Method 2:</u> the legislatures in 2/3 of the states vote to propose an amendment</p>	<p><u>Method 1:</u> Either the state senate or the state house of delegates (like a house of representatives) proposes an amendment, and a majority of members of both houses vote to approve the idea</p> <p><u>Method 2:</u> Two-thirds of the members of both the Senate and the House of Delegates vote to call a convention for proposing an amendment</p>
STEP 2: Ratifying an Amendment	<p><u>Method 1:</u> the legislatures in three-fourths (3/4) of the states vote to approve the amendment</p> <p><u>Method 2:</u> Three-fourths of the states hold conventions that vote to approve the amendment</p>	<p><u>Method 1:</u> After the next election of the House of Delegates, both the Senate and the House of Delegates vote to approve the amendment. Finally, the amendment is put on a ballot for the voters. If the voters approve the amendment, it becomes part of the constitution.</p>

Compare: There is one major way that ratifying Virginia’s constitution is different from ratifying the U.S. constitution. What is that major difference? Why do you think we don’t do that for ratifying the U.S. Constitution?

[Answer: The voters in Virginia must approve the amendment. Amendments to the U.S. Constitution do not go to a popular vote. Instead, representatives in the states represent the wishes of the voters who elected them. This is part of the "representative democracy" we have in the U.S., as opposed to a "direct" democracy, in which everyone in the country would likely vote on an amendment.]